



Region 8 Aviation Safety Manager

MAY 2009

I haven't had the opportunity to meet everyone face to face so, I thought I'd send a short message to tell you what I've been up to for the past couple of weeks. I would also like to create a forum for discussion of aviation issues and items of interest.

My official start day was April 13th, 2009 and the first two weeks are really kind of a blur. I am still in-processing and getting to know how to do the little things as well as learning my duties and responsibilities. I would invite everyone to feel free to make suggestions and give advice on what I should be doing to further the Safety interests of the Aviation Operations in Region 8.

I have had the opportunity to meet almost everyone listed in the Aviation Group and I apologize to anyone that I have not said "Hello" to and introduced myself. If we have not met please come by or stop me and let me introduce myself.

I was able to make a short trip to the airport with Dan O. and see the offices, hangar and maintenance tool room-very impressive. I got to meet Donna and say hello to Ric, whom I met in Boise during the RASM/RAO meeting in Boise the first of April. Since I met Dan Z. and Larry at that time the only person I haven't shaken by the hand is Jack. I was also able to go along on a Program Review in Region 9 with WO West personnel, which was very informative. I continue to in-process and learn my way around the Regional Office.

As I mentioned I would like to use a format similar to this to communicate some of the items that are of interest to us in the Aviation side of things. One of the items of interest and perhaps, some degree of anxiety is the Safety Management Systems (SMS) Program that the Forest Service will be implementing for ourselves and our contractors.

Before we delve into SMS I would like to give you an idea of my understanding of Aviation Safety and what I view as the critical elements of my position's duties and responsibilities. I'm sure each of you feels that your duties cover a large area both in terms of geography and the number of individual tasks. I feel the same and in order for me to be effective I have to maximize certain opportunities to make a difference.

I will try to become known to as many of our Regional aviation users as possible, both FS and Operator/Contractors. Since that is a difficult undertaking I would ask that each of you maintain your appreciation for Aviation Safety with a perspective of helping me be successful. When you have the right opportunity bring Safety into the discussion and offer my services to help anyone with issues or a need to understand what path we are taking in regard to Aviation Safety. I need you all to help me reach the folks that it would take me years to make personal contact with or perhaps even realize how to contact them.

We are taking a new path and I don't mean just SMS. SMS will play a very important role in addressing the need to improve accident prevention. But, SMS is one part of a two part change.

The first part is characterized by the adoption of a specific method of managing safety- The SMS method. The second is less recognized but will be the true measure of a successful paradigm shift in FS Aviation Management - The Safety Culture that emerges from the adoption of SMS.

We are shifting from a "Safety Program" which is a Behavior Based Safety program approach to a "Systems Management" approach. The difference may seem small unless we review the terms and define what philosophical implications are required to effect this change.

A Safety Program can be defined as an "integrated set of regulations and activities aimed at improving safety"-FAA, AC 120-92. While the FS surpasses that definition we still have a Behavior Based approach to Safety Management.

Behavior Based Safety has been and still is the model for many modern Safety Programs used by some big name companies. They have their beginnings in HW Heinrich's theories and studies, in the 1930s and 40s that developed into the first models applied to Safety in the workplace. Heinrich presented many theories that became accepted as fact and even though flawed in comparison to today's extensive research methodology, they are often quoted and used in modern Safety Management...

Heinrich suggested, based on his study, that workers committed "unsafe acts" and these were the cause of accidents. Heinrich also proposed that for each accident there were a large number of "close calls" and this presented the opportunity for intervention of various types and at various levels of performance. He depicted these levels as a pyramid structure with the close calls at the base and at the top-the accident.

The relationship of unsafe acts to accidents cannot be denied-but; the understanding of how unsafe acts can be committed in the first place is where Behavior Based Safety leaves us hanging. Behavior Based Safety is popular for simple reasons: They make Health and Safety issues seem simple, they don't require management change, they focus on the worker and they seem cheaper than addressing or correcting the hazards found in the mission.

As I said Heinrich's model is found in some form in most Safety Programs - In our Aviation Program we incorporate a version of Heinrich's Model in the use of basic requirements for pilot qualification and training. This would be our base of the pyramid and the basic level of Aviation Safety Management. The next level and opportunity for intervention or prevention is the reporting of hazards and unsafe conditions. This is voluntary by pilots or others involved in the task, or it may be reported by an observer-SafeCom.

Another level is the occasion of checking or carding a pilot. There is an opportunity to correct behavior or restrict activities if need be. The relief of a pilot from flying duties is the extreme, but the exercise of that opportunity is one of critical importance.

Where we go beyond Behavior Based response is the institution of a complete and comprehensive Safety program... We use every tool available to combat the enemies of Safe Aviation Operations. The problem is that the environment is dynamic and enemy constantly evolving. It's similar to the fight against medical illnesses- as soon as we find a workable defense the problem changes form or substance or develops immunity to the treatment. The saying that there are no new accidents is not entirely true-but; we do seem to find many different ways to have similar accidents.

But the real change and the one that is worth all the time energy, possible frustrations and work, is the evolution of a real and observable Safety Culture that adopts and embraces the philosophy that comes with the SMS Program.

SMS is viewed as an opportunity for the Forest Service and has several valuable tools that we plan to utilize on a regular basis. The definition of SMS varies depending on the source. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Safety Management Manual, Doc 9859, says it is: "An organized approach to managing safety, including the necessary organizational structures, accountabilities, policies and procedures".

The FAA states that it is a: "Structured management system to control risk in operations".

I tend not to worry about a definition and let the systems part unfold and speak for itself. We will be working over an extended period of time to bring the concepts into tangible programs along with any defined requirements. Right now we, as Aviation Managers, should be messengers with a positive outlook whenever we have the chance to discuss SMS. In order to promote SMS we need to learn more about SMS, risk management and aviation safety in general.

More to Follow--

That's my goal. I would like to provide information, foster discussion and find out what you think about SMS, and FS Aviation and how I can help with anything I can. Thanks for your attention and support.

Jim

Most accidents originate in actions committed by reasonable, rational individuals who were acting to achieve an assigned task in what they perceived to be a responsible and professional manner.....